I. THE AGE OF ANXIETY

BY ALL OUTWARD APPEARANCES OUR LIFE IS A SPARK of light between one eternal darkness and another. Nor is the interval between these two nights an unclouded day, for the more we are able to feel pleasure, the more we are vulnerable to pain—and, whether in background or foreground, the pain is always with us. We have been accustomed to make this existence worthwhile by the belief that there is more than the outward appearance—that we live for a future beyond this life here. For the outward appearance does not seem to make sense. If living is to end in pain, incompleteness, and nothingness, it seems a cruel and futile experience for beings who are born to reason, hope, create, and love. Man, as a being of sense, wants his life to make sense, and he has found it hard to believe that it does so unless there is more than what he sees—unless there is an eternal order and an eternal life behind the uncertain and momentary experience of life-and-death.

I may not, perhaps, be forgiven for introducing sober matters with a frivolous notion, but the problem of making sense out of the seeming chaos of experience reminds me of my childish desire to send someone a parcel of water in the mail. The recipient unties the string, releasing the deluge in his lap. But the game would never work, since it is irritatingly impossible to wrap and tie a pound of water in a paper package. There are kinds of paper which won't disintegrate when wet, but the trouble is to get the water itself into any manageable shape, and to tie the string without bursting the bundle.

The more one studies attempted solutions to problems in politics and economics, in art, philosophy, and religion, the more one has the impression

of extremely gifted people wearing out their ingenuity at the impossible and futile task of trying to get the water of life into neat and permanent packages.

There are many reasons why this should be particularly evident to a person living today. We know so much about history, about all the packages which have been tied and which have duly come apart. We know so much detail about the problems of life that they resist easy simplification, and seem more complex and shapeless than ever. Furthermore, science and industry have so increased both the tempo and the violence of living that our packages seem to come apart faster and faster every day.

There is, then, the feeling that we live in a time of unusual insecurity. In the past hundred years so many long-established traditions have broken down—traditions of family and social life, of government, of the economic order, and of religious belief. As the years go by, there seem to be fewer and fewer rocks to which we can hold, fewer things which we can regard as absolutely right and true, and fixed for all time.

To some this is a welcome release from the restraints of moral, social, and spiritual dogma. To others it is a dangerous and terrifying breach with reason and sanity, tending to plunge human life into hopeless chaos. To most, perhaps, the immediate sense of release has given a brief exhilaration, to be followed by the deepest anxiety. For if all is relative, if life is a torrent without form or goal in whose flood absolutely nothing save change itself can last, it seems to be something in which there is “no future” and thus no hope.

Human beings appear to be happy just so long as they have a future to which they can look forward—whether it be a “good time” tomorrow or an everlasting life beyond the grave. For various reasons, more and more people find it hard to believe in the latter. On the other hand, the former has the disadvantage that when this “good time” arrives, it is difficult to enjoy it to the full without some promise of more to come. If happiness always depends on something expected in the future, we are chasing a will-o’-the-wisp that ever eludes our grasp, until the future, and ourselves, vanish into the abyss of death.

As a matter of fact, our age is no more insecure than any other. Poverty, disease, war, change, and death are nothing new. In the best of times “security” has never been more than temporary and apparent. But it has been possible to make the insecurity of human life supportable by belief in

unchanging things beyond the reach of calamity—in God, in man's immortal soul, and in the government of the universe by eternal laws of right.

Today such convictions are rare, even in religious circles. There is no level of society, there must even be few individuals, touched by modern education, where there is not some trace of the leaven of doubt. It is simply self-evident that during the past century the authority of science has taken the place of the authority of religion in the popular imagination, and that scepticism, at least in spiritual things, has become more general than belief.

The decay of belief has come about through the honest doubt, the careful and fearless thinking of highly intelligent men of science and philosophy. Moved by a zeal and reverence for facts, they have tried to see, understand, and face life as it is without wishful thinking. Yet for all that they have done to improve the conditions of life, their picture of the universe seems to leave the individual without ultimate hope. The price of their miracles in this world has been the disappearance of the world-to-come, and one is inclined to ask the old question, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Logic, intelligence, and reason are satisfied, but the heart goes hungry. For the heart has learned to feel that we live for the future. Science may, slowly and uncertainly, give us a better future—for a few years. And then, for each of us, it will end. It will all end. However long postponed, everything composed must decompose.

Despite some opinions to the contrary, this is still the general view of science. In literary and religious circles it is now often supposed that the conflict between science and belief is a thing of the past. There are even some rather wishful scientists who feel that when modern physics abandoned a crude atomistic materialism, the chief reasons for this conflict were removed. But this is not at all the case. In most of our great centers of learning, those who make it their business to study the full implications of science and its methods are as far as ever from what they understand as a religious point of view.

Nuclear physics and relativity have, it is true, done away with the old materialism, but they now give us a view of the universe in which there is even less room for ideas of any absolute purpose or design. The modern scientist is not so naive as to deny God because he cannot be found with a telescope, or the soul because it is not revealed by the scalpel. He has merely noted that the idea of God is logically unnecessary. He even doubts

that it has any meaning. It does not help him to explain anything which he cannot explain in some other, and simpler, way.

He argues that if everything which happens is said to be under the providence and control of God, this actually amounts to saying nothing. To say that everything is governed and created by God is like saying, "Everything is up,"—which means nothing at all. The notion does not help us to make any verifiable predictions, and so, from the scientific standpoint, is of no value whatsoever. Scientists may be right in this respect. They may be wrong. It is not our purpose here to argue this point. We need only note that such scepticism has immense influence, and sets the prevailing mood of the age.

What science has said, in sum, is this: We do not, and in all probability cannot, know whether God exists. Nothing that we do know suggests that he does, and all the arguments which claim to prove his existence are found to be without logical meaning. There is nothing, indeed, to prove that there is no God, but the burden of proof rests with those who propose the idea. If, the scientists would say, you believe in God, you must do so on purely emotional grounds, without basis in logic or fact. Practically speaking, this may amount to atheism. Theoretically, it is simple agnosticism. For it is of the essence of scientific honesty that you do not pretend to know what you do not know, and of the essence of scientific method that you do not employ hypotheses which cannot be tested.

The immediate results of this honesty have been deeply unsettling and depressing. For man seems to be unable to live without myth, without the belief that the routine and drudgery, the pain and fear of this life have some meaning and goal in the future. At once new myths come into being—political and economic myths with extravagant promises of the best of futures in the present world. These myths give the individual a certain sense of meaning by making him part of a vast social effort, in which he loses something of his own emptiness and loneliness. Yet the very violence of these political religions betrays the anxiety beneath them—for they are but men huddling together and shouting to give themselves courage in the dark.

Once there is the suspicion that a religion is a myth, its power has gone. It may be necessary for man to have a myth, but he cannot self-consciously prescribe one as he can mix a pill for a headache. A myth can only "work" when it is thought to be truth, and man cannot for long knowingly and intentionally "kid" himself.

Even the best modern apologists for religion seem to overlook this fact. For their most forceful arguments for some sort of return to orthodoxy are those which show the social and moral advantages of belief in God. But this does not prove that God is a reality. It proves, at most, that believing in God is useful. “If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.” Perhaps. But if the public has any suspicion that he does not exist, the invention is in vain.

It is for this reason that most of the current return to orthodoxy in some intellectual circles has a rather hollow ring. So much of it is more a belief in believing than a belief in God. The contrast between the insecure, neurotic, educated “modern” and the quiet dignity and inner peace of the old-fashioned believer, makes the latter a man to be envied. But it is a serious misapplication of psychology to make the presence or absence of neurosis the touchstone of truth, and to argue that if a man’s philosophy makes him neurotic, it must be wrong. “Most atheists and agnostics are neurotic, whereas most simple Catholics are happy and at peace with themselves. Therefore the views of the former are false, and of the latter true.”

Even if the observation is correct, the reasoning based on it is absurd. It is as if to say, “You say there is a fire in the basement. You are upset about it. Because you are upset, there is obviously no fire.” The agnostic, the sceptic, is neurotic, but this does not imply a false philosophy; it implies the discovery of facts to which he does not know how to adapt himself. The intellectual who tries to escape from neurosis by escaping from the facts is merely acting on the principle that “where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to be wise.”

When belief in the eternal becomes impossible, and there is only the poor substitute of belief in believing, men seek their happiness in the joys of time. However much they may try to bury it in the depths of their minds, they are well aware that these joys are both uncertain and brief. This has two results. On the one hand, there is the anxiety that one may be missing something, so that the mind flits nervously and greedily from one pleasure to another, without finding rest and satisfaction in any. On the other, the frustration of having always to pursue a future good in a tomorrow which never comes, and in a world where everything must disintegrate, gives men an attitude of “What’s the use anyhow?”

Consequently our age is one of frustration, anxiety, agitation, and addiction to “dope.” Somehow we must grab what we can while we can,

and drown out the realization that the whole thing is futile and meaningless. This "dope" we call our high standard of living, a violent and complex stimulation of the senses, which makes them progressively less sensitive and thus in need of yet more violent stimulation. We crave distraction—a panorama of sights, sounds, thrills, and titillations into which as much as possible must be crowded in the shortest possible time.

To keep up this "standard" most of us are willing to put up with lives that consist largely in doing jobs that are a bore, earning the means to seek relief from the tedium by intervals of hectic and expensive pleas-sure. These intervals are supposed to be the real *living*, the real purpose served by the necessary evil of work. Or we imagine that the justification of such work is the rearing of a family to go on doing the same kind of thing, in order to rear another family … and so *ad infinitum*.

This is no caricature. It is the simple reality of millions of lives, so commonplace that we need hardly dwell upon the details, save to note the anxiety and frustration of those who put up with it, not knowing what else to do.

But what *are* we to do? The alternatives seem to be two. The first is, somehow or other, to discover a new myth, or convincingly resuscitate an old one. If science cannot *prove* there is no God, we can try to live and act on the bare chance that he may exist after all. There seems to be nothing to lose in such a gamble, for if death is the end, we shall never know that we have lost. But, obviously, this will never amount to a vital faith, for it is really no more than to say, "Since the whole thing is futile anyhow, let's pretend it isn't." The second is to try grimly to face the fact that life is "a tale told by an idiot," and make of it what we can, letting science and technology serve us as well as they may in our journey from nothing to nothing.

Yet these are not the only solutions. We may begin by granting all the agnosticism of a critical science. We may admit, frankly, that we have no scientific grounds for belief in God, in personal immortality, or in any absolutes. We may refrain altogether from trying to believe, taking life just as it is, and no more. From this *point of departure* there is yet another way of life that requires neither myth nor despair. But it requires a complete revolution in our ordinary, habitual ways of thinking and feeling.

The extraordinary thing about this revolution is that it reveals the truth behind the so-called myths of traditional religion and metaphysic. It reveals,

not beliefs, but actual realities corresponding—in an unexpected way—to the ideas of God and of eternal life. There are reasons for supposing that a revolution of this kind was the original source of some of the main religious ideas, standing in relation to them as reality to symbol and cause to effect. The common error of ordinary religious practice is to mistake the symbol for the reality, to look at the finger pointing the way and then to suck it for comfort rather than follow it. Religious ideas are like words—of little use, and often misleading, unless you know the concrete realities to which they refer. The word “water” is a useful means of communication amongst those who know water. The same is true of the word and the idea called “God.”

I do not, at this point, wish to seem mysterious or to be making claims to “secret knowledge.” The reality which corresponds to “God” and “eternal life” is honest, above-board, plain, and open for all to see. But the seeing requires a correction of mind, just as clear vision sometimes requires a correction of the eyes.

The discovery of this reality is hindered rather than helped by belief, whether one believes in God or believes in atheism. We must here make a clear distinction between belief and faith, because, in general practice, belief has come to mean a state of mind which is almost the opposite of faith. Belief, as I use the word here, is the insistence that the truth is what one would “lief” or wish it to be. The believer will open his mind to the truth on condition that it fits in with his preconceived ideas and wishes. Faith, on the other hand, is an unreserved opening of the mind to the truth, whatever it may turn out to be. Faith has no preconceptions; it is a plunge into the unknown. Belief clings, but faith lets go. In this sense of the word, faith is the essential virtue of science, and likewise of any religion that is not self-deception.

Most of us believe in order to feel secure, in order to make our individual lives seem valuable and meaningful. Belief has thus become an attempt to hang on to life, to grasp and keep it for one’s own. But you cannot understand life and its mysteries as long as you try to grasp it. Indeed, you cannot grasp it, just as you cannot walk off with a river in a bucket. If you try to capture running water in a bucket, it is clear that you do not understand it and that you will always be disappointed, for in the bucket the water does not run. To “have” running water you must let go of it and let it run. The same is true of life and of God.

The present phase of human thought and history is especially ripe for this "letting go." Our minds have been prepared for it by this very collapse of the beliefs in which we have sought security. From a point of view strictly, if strangely, in accord with certain religious traditions, this disappearance of the old rocks and absolutes is no calamity, but rather a blessing. It almost compels us to face reality with open minds, and you can only know God through an open mind just as you can only see the sky through a clear window. You will not see the sky if you have covered the glass with blue paint.

But "religious" people who resist the scraping of the paint from the glass, who regard the scientific attitude with fear and mistrust, and confuse faith with clinging to certain ideas, are curiously ignorant of laws of the spiritual life which they might find in their own traditional records. A careful study of comparative religion and spiritual philosophy reveals that abandonment of belief, of any clinging to a future life for one's own, and of any attempt to escape from finitude and mortality, is a regular and normal stage in the way of the spirit. Indeed, this is actually such a "first principle" of the spiritual life that it should have been obvious from the beginning, and it seems, after all, surprising that learned theologians should adopt anything but a cooperative attitude towards the critical philosophy of science.

Surely it is old news that salvation comes only through the death of the human form of God. But it was not, perhaps, so easy to see that God's human form is not simply the historic Christ, but also the images, ideas, and beliefs in the Absolute to which man clings in his mind. Here is the full sense of the commandment, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above; … thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them."

To discover the ultimate Reality of life—the Absolute, the eternal, God—you must cease to try to grasp it in the forms of idols. These idols are not just crude images, such as the mental picture of God as an old gentleman on a golden throne. They are our beliefs, our cherished preconceptions of the truth, which block the unreserved opening of mind and heart to reality. The legitimate use of images is to express the truth, not to possess it.

This was always recognized in the great Oriental traditions such as Buddhism, Vedanta, and Taoism. The principle has not been unknown to Christians, for it was implicit in the whole story and teaching of Christ. His life was from the beginning a complete acceptance and embracing of

insecurity. “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.”

The principle is yet more to the point if Christ is regarded as divine in the most orthodox sense—as the unique and special incarnation of God. For the basic theme of the Christ-story is that this “express image” of God becomes the source of life in the very act of being destroyed. To the disciples who tried to cling to his divinity in the form of his human individuality he explained, “Unless a grain of corn fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.” In the same vein he warned them, “It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Paraclete (the Holy Spirit) cannot come unto you.”

These words are more than ever applicable to Christians, and speak exactly to the whole condition of our times. For we have never actually understood the revolutionary sense beneath them—the incredible truth that what religion calls the vision of God is found in giving up any belief in the idea of God. By the same law of reversed effort, we discover the “infinite” and the “absolute,” not by straining to escape from the finite and relative world, but by the most complete acceptance of its limitations. Paradox as it may seem, we likewise find life meaningful only when we have seen that it is without purpose, and know the “mystery of the universe” only when we are convinced that we know nothing about it at all. The ordinary agnostic, relativist, or materialist fails to reach this point because he does not follow his line of thought consistently to its end—an end which would be the surprise of his life. All too soon he abandons faith, openness to reality, and lets his mind harden into doctrine. The discovery of the mystery, the wonder beyond all wonders, needs no belief, for we can only believe in what we have already known, preconceived, and imagined. But *this* is beyond any imagination. We have but to open the eyes of the mind wide enough, and “the truth will out.”

II. PAIN AND TIME

AT TIMES ALMOST ALL OF US ENVY THE ANIMALS. They suffer and die, but they do not seem to make a "problem" of it. Their lives seem to have so few complications. They eat when they are hungry and sleep when they are tired, and instinct rather than anxiety seems to govern their few preparations for the future. As far as we can judge, every animal is so busy with what he is doing at the moment that it never enters his head to ask whether life has a meaning or a future. For the animal, happiness consists in enjoying life in the immediate present—not in the assurance that there is a whole future of joys ahead of him.

This is not just because the animal is a relatively insensitive clod. Often enough his eyesight, his sense of hearing and smell, are far more acute than ours, and one can hardly doubt that he enjoys his food and sleep immensely. Despite his acute senses, he has, however, a somewhat insensitive brain. It is more specialized than ours, for which reason he is a creature of habit; he is unable to reason and make abstractions, and has extremely limited powers of memory and prediction.

Unquestionably the sensitive human brain adds immeasurably to the richness of life. Yet for this we pay dearly, because the increase in over-all sensitivity makes us peculiarly vulnerable. One can be less vulnerable by becoming less sensitive—more of a stone and less of a man—and so less capable of enjoyment. Sensitivity requires a high degree of softness and fragility—eyeballs, eardrums, taste buds, and nerve ends culminating in the highly delicate organism of the brain. These are not only soft and fragile, but also perishable. There seems to be no effective way of decreasing the

delicacy and perishability of living tissue without also decreasing its vitality and sensitivity.

If we are to have intense pleasures, we must also be liable to intense pains. The pleasure we love, and the pain we hate, but it seems impossible to have the former without the latter. Indeed, it looks as if the two *must* in some way alternate, for continuous pleasure is a stimulus that must either pall or be increased. And the increase will either harden the sense buds with its friction, or turn into pain. A consistent diet of rich food either destroys the appetite or makes one sick.

To the degree, then, that life is found good, death must be proportionately evil. The more we are able to love another person and to enjoy his company, the greater must be our grief at his death, or in separation. The further the power of consciousness ventures out into experience, the more is the price it must pay for its knowledge. It is understandable that we should sometimes ask whether life has not gone too far in this direction, whether "the game is worth the candle," and whether it might not be better to turn the course of evolution in the only other possible direction—backwards, to the relative peace of the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral.

Something of this kind is often attempted. There is the woman who, having suffered some deep emotional injury in love or marriage, vows never to let another man play on her feelings, assuming the role of the hard and bitter spinster. Almost more common is the sensitive boy who learns in school to encrust himself for life in the shell of the "tough-guy" attitude. As an adult he plays, in self-defense, the role of the Philistine, to whom all intellectual and emotional culture is womanish and "sissy." Carried to its final extreme, the logical end of this type of reaction to life is suicide. The hard-bitten kind of person is always, as it were, a partial suicide; some of himself is already dead.

If, then, we are to be fully human and fully alive and aware, it seems that we must be willing to suffer for our pleasures. Without such willingness there can be no growth in the intensity of consciousness. Yet, generally speaking, we are not willing, and it may be thought strange to suppose that we can be. For "nature in us" so rebels against pain that the very notion of "willingness" to put up with it beyond a certain point may appear impossible and meaningless.

Under these circumstances, the life that we live is a contradiction and a conflict. Because consciousness *must* involve both pleasure and pain, to

strive for pleasure to the exclusion of pain is, in effect, to strive for the loss of consciousness. Because such a loss is in principle the same as death, this means that the more we struggle for life (as pleasure), the more we are actually killing what we love.

Indeed, this is the common attitude of man to so much that he loves. For the greater part of human activity is designed to make permanent those experiences and joys which are only lovable because they are changing. Music is a delight because of its rhythm and flow. Yet the moment you arrest the flow and prolong a note or chord beyond its time, the rhythm is destroyed. Because life is likewise a flowing process, change and death are its necessary parts. To work for their exclusion is to work against life.

However, the simple experiencing of alternating pain and pleasure is by no means the heart of the human problem. The reason that we want life to mean something, that we seek God or eternal life, is not merely that we are trying to get away from an immediate experience of pain. Nor is it for any such reason that we assume attitudes and roles as habits of perpetual self-defense. The real problem does not come from any momentary sensitivity to pain, but from our marvelous powers of memory and foresight—in short from our consciousness of *time*.

For the animal to be happy it is enough that this moment be enjoyable. But man is hardly satisfied with this at all. He is much more concerned to have enjoyable memories and expectations — especially the latter. With these assured, he can put up with an extremely miserable present. Without this assurance, he can be extremely miserable in the midst of immediate physical pleasure.

Here is a person who knows that in two weeks' time he has to undergo a surgical operation. In the meantime he is feeling no physical pain; he has plenty to eat; he is surrounded by friends and human affection; he is doing work that is normally of great interest to him. But his power to enjoy these things is taken away by constant dread. He is insensitive to the immediate realities around him. His mind is preoccupied with something that is not yet here. It is not as if he were thinking about it in a practical way, trying to decide whether he should have the operation or not, or making plans to take care of his family and his affairs if he should die. These decisions have already been made. Rather, he is thinking about the operation in an entirely futile way, which both ruins his present enjoyment of life and contributes nothing to the solution of any problem. But he cannot help himself.

This is the typical human problem. The object of dread may not be an operation in the immediate future. It may be the problem of next month's rent, of a threatened war or social disaster, of being able to save enough for old age, or of death at the last. This "spoiler of the present" may not even be a future dread. It may be something out of the past, some memory of an injury, some crime or indiscretion, which haunts the present with a sense of resentment or guilt. The power of memories and expectations is such that for most human beings the past and the future are not *as* real, but *more* real than the present. The present cannot be lived happily unless the past has been "cleared up" and the future is bright with promise.

There can be no doubt that the power to remember and predict, to make an ordered sequence out of a helter-skelter chaos of disconnected moments, is a wonderful development of sensitivity. In a way it is *the* achievement of the human brain, giving man the most extraordinary powers of survival and adaptation to life. But the way in which we generally use this power is apt to destroy all its advantages. For it is of little use to us to be able to remember and predict if it makes us unable to live fully in the present.

What is the use of planning to be able to eat next week unless I can really enjoy the meals when they come? If I am so busy planning how to eat next week that I cannot fully enjoy what I am eating *now*, I will be in the same predicament when next week's meals become "now."

If my happiness at this moment consists largely in reviewing happy memories and expectations, I am but dimly aware of this present. I shall still be dimly aware of the present when the good things that I have been expecting come to pass. For I shall have formed a habit of looking behind and ahead, making it difficult for me to attend to the here and now. If, then, my awareness of the past and future makes me less aware of the present, I must begin to wonder whether I am actually living in the real world.

After all, the future is quite meaningless and unimportant unless, sooner or later, it is going to become the present. Thus to plan for a future which is not going to become present is hardly more absurd than to plan for a future which, when it comes to me, will find me "absent," looking fixedly over its shoulder instead of into its face.

This kind of living in the fantasy of expectation rather than the reality of the present is the special trouble of those business men who live entirely to make money. So many people of wealth understand much more about making and saving money than about using and enjoying it. They fail to

live because they are always preparing to live. Instead of earning a living they are mostly earning an earning, and thus when the time comes to relax they are unable to do so. Many a "successful" man is bored and miserable when he retires, and returns to his work only to prevent a younger man from taking his place.

From still another point of view the way in which we use memory and prediction makes us less, rather than more, adaptable to life. If to enjoy even an enjoyable present we *must* have the assurance of a happy future, we are "crying for the moon." We have no such assurance. The best predictions are still matters of probability rather than certainty, and to the best of our knowledge every one of us is going to suffer and die. If, then, we cannot live happily without an assured future, we are certainly not adapted to living in a finite world where, despite the best plans, accidents will happen, and where death comes at the end.

This, then, is the human problem: there is a price to be paid for every increase in consciousness. We cannot be more sensitive to pleasure without being more sensitive to pain. By remembering the past we can plan for the future. But the ability to plan for pleasure is offset by the "ability" to dread pain and to fear the unknown. Furthermore, the growth of an acute sense of the past and the future gives us a correspondingly dim sense of the present. In other words, we seem to reach a point where the advantages of being conscious are outweighed by its disadvantages, where extreme sensitivity makes us unadaptable.

Under these circumstances we feel in conflict with our own bodies and the world around them, and it is consoling to be able to think that in this contradictory world we are but "strangers and pilgrims." For if our desires are out of accord with anything that the finite world can offer, it might seem that our nature is not of this world, that our hearts are made, not for the finite, but for infinity. The discontent of our souls would appear to be the sign and seal of their divinity.

But does the desire for something prove that the thing exists? We know that it does not necessarily do so at all. It may be consoling to think that we are citizens of another world than this, and that after our exile upon earth we may return to the true home of our heart's desire. But if we *are* citizens of this world, and if there can be no final satisfaction of the soul's discontent, has not nature, in bringing forth man, made a serious mistake?

For it would seem that, in man, life is in hopeless conflict with itself. To be happy, we must have what we cannot have. In man, nature has conceived desires which it is impossible to satisfy. To drink more fully of the fountain of pleasure, it has brought forth capacities which make man the more susceptible to pain. It has given us the power to control the future but a little—the price of which is the frustration of knowing that we must at last go down in defeat. If we find this absurd, this is only to say that nature has conceived intelligence in us to berate itself for absurdity. Consciousness seems to be nature's ingenious mode of self-torture.

Of course we do not want to think that this is true. But it would be easy to show that most reasoning to the contrary is but wishful thinking—nature's method of putting off suicide so that the idiocy can continue. Reasoning, then, is not enough. We must go deeper. We must look into this life, this nature, which has become aware within us, and find out whether it is really in conflict with itself, whether it *actually* desires the security and the painlessness which its individual forms can never enjoy.

III. THE GREAT STREAM

WE SEEM TO BE LIKE FLIES CAUGHT IN HONEY. Because life is sweet we do not want to give it up, and yet the more we become involved in it, the more we are trapped, limited, and frustrated. We love it and hate it at the same time. We fall in love with people and possessions only to be tortured by anxiety for them. The conflict is not only between ourselves and the surrounding universe; it is between ourselves and ourselves. For intractable nature is both around and within us. The exasperating "life" which is at once lovable and perishable, pleasant and painful, a blessing and a curse, is also the life of our own bodies.

It is as if we were divided into two parts. On the one hand there is the conscious "I," at once intrigued and baffled, the creature who is caught in the trap. On the other hand there is "me," and "me" is a part of nature—the wayward flesh with all its concurrently beautiful and frustrating limitations. "I" fancies itself as a reasonable fellow, and is forever criticizing "me" for its perversity—for having passions which get "I" into trouble, for being so easily subject to painful and irritating diseases, for having organs that wear out, and for having appetites which can never be satisfied—so designed that if you try to allay them finally and fully in one big "bust," you get sick.

Perhaps the most exasperating thing about "me," about nature and the universe, is that it will never "stay put." It is like a beautiful woman who will never be caught, and whose very flightiness is her charm. For the perishability and changefulness of the world is part and parcel of its liveliness and loveliness. This is why the poets are so often at their best when speaking of change, of "the transitoriness of human life." The beauty

of such poetry lies in something more than a note of nostalgia which brings a catch in the throat.

> *Our revels now are ended. These our actors,*
> *As I foretold you, were all spirits, and*
> *Are melted into air, into thin air:*
> *And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,*
> *The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,*
> *The solemn temples, the great globe itself,*
> *Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,*
> *And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,*
> *Leave not a rack behind.*

There is more in this beauty than the succession of melodious images, and the theme of dissolution does not simply borrow its splendor from the things dissolved. The truth is rather that the images, though beautiful in themselves, come to life in the act of vanishing. The poet takes away their static solidity, and turns a beauty which would otherwise be only statuesque and architectural into music, which, no sooner than it is sounded, dies away. The towers, palaces, and temples become vibrant, and break from the excess of life within them. To be passing is to live; to remain and continue is to die. "Unless a grain of corn fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit."

For the poets have seen the truth that life, change, movement, and insecurity are so many names for the same thing. Here, if anywhere, truth is beauty, for movement and rhythm are of the essence of all things lovable. In sculpture, architecture, and painting the finished form stands still, but even so the eye finds pleasure in the form only when it contains a certain lack of symmetry, when, frozen in stone as it may be, it looks as if it were in the midst of motion.

Is it not, then, a strange inconsistency and an unnatural paradox that "I" resists change in "me" and in the surrounding universe? For change is not merely a force of destruction. Every form is really a pattern of movement, and every living thing is like the river, which, if it did not flow out, would never have been able to flow in. Life and death are not two opposed forces; they are simply two ways of looking at the same force, for the movement of change is as much the builder as the destroyer. The human body lives

because it is a complex of motions, of circulation, respiration, and digestion. To resist change, to try to cling to life, is therefore like holding your breath: if you persist you kill yourself.

In thinking of ourselves as divided into “I” and “me,” we easily forget that consciousness also lives because it is moving. It is as much a part and product of the stream of change as the body and the whole natural world. If you look at it carefully, you will see that consciousness—the thing you call “I”—is really a stream of experiences, of sensations, thoughts, and feelings in constant motion. But because these experiences include memories, we have the impression that “I” is something solid and still, like a tablet upon which life is writing a record.

Yet the “tablet” moves with the writing finger as the river flows along with the ripples, so that memory is like a record written on water—a record, not of graven characters, but of waves stirred into motion by other waves which are called sensations and facts. The difference between “I” and “me” is largely an illusion of memory. In truth, “I” is of the same nature as “me.” It is part of our whole being, just as the head is part of the body. But if this is not realized, “I” and “me,” the head and the body, will feel at odds with each other. “I,” not understanding that it too is part of the stream of change, will try to make sense of the world and experience by attempting to *fix* it.

We shall then have a war between consciousness and nature, between the desire for permanence and the fact of flux. This war must be utterly futile and frustrating—a vicious circle—because it is a conflict between two parts of the same thing. It must lead thought and action into circles which go nowhere faster and faster. For when we fail to see that our life *is* change, we set ourselves against ourselves and become like Ouroboros, the misguided snake, who tries to eat his own tail. Ouroboros is the perennial symbol of all vicious circles, of every attempt to split our being asunder and make one part conquer the other.

Struggle as we may, “fixing” will never make sense out of change. The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance.

Religion, as most of us have known it, has quite obviously tried to make sense out of life by fixation. It has tried to give this passing world a meaning by relating it to an unchanging God, and by seeing its goal and purpose as an immortal life in which the individual becomes one with the changeless nature of the deity. “Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and

let light perpetual shine upon them." Likewise, it attempts to make sense out of the swirling movements of history by relating them to the fixed laws of God, "whose Word endureth for ever."

We have thus made a problem for ourselves by confusing the intelligible with the fixed. We think that making sense out of life is impossible unless the flow of events can somehow be fitted into a framework of rigid forms. To be meaningful, life must be understandable in terms of fixed ideas and laws, and these in turn must correspond to unchanging and eternal realities behind the shifting scene.[1] But if this is what "making sense out of life" means, we have set ourselves the impossible task of making fixity out of flux.

Before we can find out whether there is some better way of understanding our universe, we must see clearly how this confusion of "sense" with "fixity" has come about.

The root of the difficulty is that we have developed the power of thinking so rapidly and one-sidedly that we have forgotten the proper relation between thoughts and events, words and things. Conscious thinking has gone ahead and created its own world, and, when this is found to conflict with the real world, we have the sense of a profound discord between "I," the conscious thinker, and nature. This one-sided development of man is not peculiar to intellectuals and "brainy" people, who are only extreme examples of a tendency which has affected our entire civilization.

What we have forgotten is that thoughts and words are *conventions*, and that it is fatal to take conventions too seriously. A convention is a social convenience, as, for example, money. Money gets rid of the inconveniences of barter. But it is absurd to take money too seriously, to confuse it with real wealth, because it will do you no good to eat it or wear it for clothing. Money is more or less static, for gold, silver, strong paper, or a bank balance can "stay put" for a long time. But real wealth, such as food, is perishable. Thus a community may possess all the gold in the world, but if it does not farm its crops it will starve.

In somewhat the same way, thoughts, ideas, and words are "coins" for real things. They are *not* those things, and though they represent them, there are many ways in which they do not correspond at all. As with money and wealth, so with thoughts and things: ideas and words are more or less fixed, whereas real things change.

It is easier to say “I” than to point to your own body, and to say “want” than to try to indicate a vague feeling in the mouth and stomach. It is more convenient to say “water” than to lead your friend to a well and make suitable motions. It is also convenient to agree to use the same words for the same things, and to keep these words unchanged, even though the things we are indicating are in constant motion.

In the beginning, the power of words must have seemed magical, and, indeed, the miracles which verbal thinking has wrought have justified the impression. What a marvel it must have been to get rid of the nuisances of sign-language and summon a friend simply by making a short noise—his name! It is no wonder that names have been considered uncanny manifestations of supernatural power, and that men have identified their names with their souls or used them to invoke spiritual forces. Indeed, the power of words has gone to man’s head in more than one way. To define has come to mean almost the same thing as to understand. More important still, words have enabled man to define himself—to label a certain part of his experience “I.”

This is, perhaps, the meaning of the ancient belief that the name is the soul. For to define is to isolate, to separate some complex of forms from the stream of life and say, “This is I.” When man can name and define himself, he feels that he has an identity. Thus he begins to feel, like the word, separate and static, as over against the real, fluid world of nature.

Feeling separate, the sense of conflict between man, on the one hand, and nature, on the other, begins. Language and thought grapple with the conflict, and the magic which can summon a man by naming him is applied to the universe. Its powers are named, personalized, and invoked in mythology and religion. Natural processes are made intelligible, because all *regular* processes—such as the rotation of the stars and seasons—can be fitted to words and ascribed to the activity of the gods or God, the eternal Word. At a later time science employs the same process, studying every kind of regularity in the universe, naming, classifying, and making use of them in ways still more miraculous.

But because it is the use and nature of words and thoughts to be fixed, definite, isolated, it is extremely hard to describe the most important characteristic of life—its movement and fluidity. Just as money does not represent the perishability and edibility of food, so words and thoughts do not represent the vitality of life. The relation between thought and

movement is something like the difference between a real man running and a motion-picture film which shows the running as a series of “stills.”

We resort to the convention of stills whenever we want to describe or think about any moving body, such as a train, stating that at such-and-such times it is *at* such-and-such places. But this is not quite true. You can say that a train is at a particular point “now!” But it took you some time to say “now!” and during that time, however short, the train was still moving. You can only say that the moving train actually *is* (i.e., stops) at a particular point for a particular moment if both are infinitely small. But infinitely small points and fixed moments are always imaginary points, being denizens of mathematical theory rather than the real world.

It is most convenient for scientific calculation to think of a movement as a series of very small jerks or stills. But confusion arises when the world described and measured by such conventions is identified with the world of experience. A series of stills does not, unless rapidly *moved* before our eyes, convey the essential vitality and beauty of movement. The definition, the description, leaves out the most important thing.

Useful as these conventions are for purposes of calculation, language, and logic, absurdities arise when we think that the kind of language we use or the kind of logic with which we reason can really define or explain the “physical” world. Part of man’s frustration is that he has become accustomed to expect language and thought to offer explanations which they cannot give. To want life to be “intelligible” in this sense is to want it to be something other than life. It is to prefer a motion-picture film to a real, running man. To feel that life is meaningless unless “I” can be permanent is like having fallen desperately in love with an inch.

Words and measures do not give life; they merely symbolize it. Thus all “explanations” of the universe couched in language are circular, and leave the most essential things unexplained and undefined. The dictionary itself is circular. It defines words in terms of other words. The dictionary comes a little closer to life when, alongside some word, it gives you a picture. But it will be noted that all dictionary pictures are attached to nouns rather than verbs. An illustration of the verb *to run* would have to be a series of stills like a comic strip, for words and static pictures can neither define nor explain a motion.

Even the nouns are conventions. You do not define this real, living “something” by associating it with the noise *man*. When we say, “This

(pointing with the finger) *is* a man," the thing to which we point is not *man*. To be clearer we should have said, "This is symbolized by the noise *man*." What, then, is *this*? We do not know. That is to say, we cannot define it in any fixed way, though, in another sense, we know it as our immediate experience—a flowing process without definable beginning or end. It is convention alone which persuades me that I am simply this body bounded by a skin in space, and by birth and death in time.

Where do I begin and end in space? I have relations to the sun and air which are just as vital parts of my existence as my heart. The movement in which I am a pattern or convolution began incalculable ages before the (conventionally isolated) event called birth, and will continue long after the event called death. Only words and conventions can isolate us from the entirely undefinable something which is everything.

Now these are useful words, so long as we treat them as conventions and use them like the imaginary lines of latitude and longitude which are drawn upon maps, but are not actually found upon the face of the earth. But in practice we are all bewitched by words. We confuse them with the real world, and try to live in the real world as if it were the world of words. As a consequence, we are dismayed and dumbfounded when they do not fit. The more we try to live in the world of words, the more we feel isolated and alone, the more all the joy and liveliness of things is exchanged for mere certainty and security. On the other hand, the more we are forced to admit that we actually live in the real world, the more we feel ignorant, uncertain, and insecure about everything.

But there can be no sanity unless the difference between these two worlds is recognized. The scope and purposes of science are woefully misunderstood when the universe which it describes is confused with the universe in which man lives. Science is talking about a symbol of the real universe, and this symbol has much the same use as money. It is a convenient timesaver for making practical arrangements. But when money and wealth, reality and science are confused, the symbol becomes a burden.

Similarly, the universe described in formal, dogmatic religion is nothing more than a symbol of the real world, being likewise constructed out of verbal and conventional distinctions. To separate "this person" from the rest of the universe is to make a conventional separation. To want "this person" to be eternal is to want the words to be the reality, and to insist that a convention endure for ever and ever. We hunger for the perpetuity of

something which never existed. Science has “destroyed” the religious symbol of the world because, when symbols are confused with reality, different ways of symbolizing reality will seem contradictory.

The scientific way of symbolizing the world is more suited to utilitarian purposes than the religious way, but this does not mean that it has any more “truth.” Is it truer to classify rabbits according to their meat or according to their fur? It depends on what you want to do with them. The clash between science and religion has not shown that religion is false and science is true. It has shown that all systems of definition are relative to various purposes, and that none of them actually “grasp” reality. And because religion was being misused as a means for actually grasping and possessing the mystery of life, a certain measure of “debunking” was highly necessary.

But in the process of symbolizing the universe in this way or that for this purpose or that we seem to have lost the actual joy and meaning of life itself. All the various definitions of the universe have had ulterior motives, being concerned with the future rather than the present. Religion wants to assure the future beyond death, and science wants to assure it until death, and to postpone death. But tomorrow and plans for tomorrow can have no significance at all unless you are in full contact with the reality of the present, since it is in the present and *only* in the present that you live. There is no other reality than present reality, so that, even if one were to live for endless ages, to live for the future would be to miss the point everlastingly.

But it is just this reality of the present, this moving, vital *now* which eludes all the definitions and descriptions. Here is the mysterious real world which words and ideas can never pin down. Living always for the future, we are out of touch with this source and center of life, and as a result all the magic of naming and thinking has come to something of a temporary breakdown.

The miracles of technology cause us to live in a hectic, clockwork world that does violence to human biology, enabling us to do nothing but pursue the future faster and faster. Deliberate thought finds itself unable to control the upsurge of the beast in man—a beast more “beastly” than any creature of the wild, maddened and exasperated by the pursuit of illusions. Specialization in verbiage, classification, and mechanized thinking has put man out of touch with many of the marvelous powers of “instinct” which govern his body. It has, furthermore, made him feel utterly separate from the universe and his own “me.” And thus when all philosophy has dissolved

in relativism, and can make fixed sense of the universe no longer, isolated "I" feels miserably insecure and panicky, finding the real world a flat contradiction of its whole being.

Of course there is nothing new in this predicament of discovering that ideas and words cannot plumb the ultimate mystery of life, that Reality or, if you will, God cannot be comprehended by the finite mind. The only novelty is that the predicament is now social rather than individual; it is widely felt, not confined to the few. Almost every spiritual tradition recognizes that a point comes when two things must happen: man must surrender his separate-feeling "I," and must face the fact that he cannot know, that is, define the ultimate.

These traditions also recognize that beyond this point there lies a "vision of God" which cannot be put into words, and which is certainly something utterly different from perceiving a radiant gentleman on a golden throne; or a literal flash of blinding light. They also indicate that this vision is a restoration of something which we once had, and "lost" because we did not or could not appreciate it. This vision is, then, the unclouded awareness of this undefinable "something" which we call life, present reality, the great stream, the eternal now—an awareness without the sense of separation from it.

The moment I name it, it is no longer God; it is man, tree, green, black, red, soft, hard, long, short, atom, universe. One would readily agree with any theologian who deplores pantheism that these denizens of the world of verbiage and convention, these sundry "things" conceived as fixed and distinct entities, are not God. If you ask me to show you God, I will point to the sun, or a tree, or a worm. But if you say, "You mean, then, that God is the sun, the tree, the worm, and all other things?"—I shall have to say that you have missed the point entirely.

[1] Later on in this book we shall see that these metaphysical ideas of the unchanging and the eternal can have another sense. They do not necessarily imply a static view of reality, and while ordinarily used as attempts to "fix the flux" they have not always been so.

IV. THE WISDOM OF THE BODY

WHAT IS EXPERIENCE? WHAT IS LIFE? WHAT IS MOTION? What is reality? To all such questions we must give St. Augustine's answer to the question, "What is time?"—"I know, but when you ask me I don't." Experience, life, motion, and reality are so many noises used to symbolize the sum of sensations, thoughts, feelings, and desires. And if you ask, "What are sensations, et cetera?" I can only answer, "Don't be silly. You know very well what they are. We can't go on defining things indefinitely without going round in circles. To define means to fix, and, when you get down to it, real life isn't fixed."

It was suggested at the end of the last chapter that this ultimate something which cannot be defined or fixed can be represented by the word *God*. If this be true, we know God all the time—but when we begin to think about it we don't. For when we begin to think about experience we try to fix it in rigid forms and ideas. It is the old problem of trying to tie up water in parcels, or attempting to shut the wind in a box.

Yet it has always been taught in religion that "God" is something from which one can expect wisdom and guidance. We have become accustomed to the idea that wisdom—that is, knowledge, advice, and information—can be expressed in verbal statements consisting of specific directions. If this be true, it is hard to see how any wisdom can be extracted from something impossible to define.

But in fact the kind of wisdom which can be put in the form of specific directions amounts to very little, and most of the wisdom which we employ in everyday life never came to us as verbal information. It was not through statements that we learned how to breathe, swallow, see, circulate the blood, digest food, or resist diseases. Yet these things are performed by the most complex and marvelous processes which no amount of book-learning and technical skill can reproduce. This is real wisdom—but our brains have little to do with it. This is the kind of wisdom which we need in solving the real, practical problems of human life. It has done wonders for us already, and there is no reason why it should not do much more.

Without any technical apparatus or calculations for prediction, homing-pigeons can return to their roosts from long distances away, migrant birds can revisit the same locations year after year, and plants can "devise" wonderful contraptions for distributing their seeds on the wind. They do not, of course, do these things "on purpose," which is only to say that they do not plan and think them out. If they could talk, they could no more explain how it is done than the average man can explain how his heart beats.

The "instruments" which achieve these feats are, indeed, organs and processes of the body—that is to say, of a mysterious pattern of movement which we do not really understand and cannot actually define. In general, however, human beings have ceased to develop the instruments of the body. More and more we try to effect an adaptation to life by means of external gadgets, and attempt to solve our problems by conscious thinking rather than unconscious "know-how." This is much less to our advantage than we like to suppose.

There are, for instance, "primitive" women who can deliver themselves of a child while working out in the fields, and, after doing the few things necessary to see that the baby is safe, warm, and comfortable, resume their work as before. On the other hand, the civilized woman has to be moved to a complicated hospital, and there, surrounded by doctors, nurses, and innumerable gadgets, force the poor thing into the world with prolonged contortions and excruciating pains. It is true that antiseptic conditions prevent many mothers and babies from dying, but why can't we have the antiseptic conditions *and* the natural, easy way of birth?

The answer to this, and many similar questions, is that we have been taught to neglect, despise, and violate our bodies, and to put all faith in our

brains. Indeed, the special disease of civilized man might be described as a block or schism between his brain (specifically, the cortex) and the rest of his body. This corresponds to the split between “I” and “me,” man and nature, and to the confusion of Ouroboros, the mixed-up snake, who does not know that his tail belongs with his head. Happily, there have, in recent years, been at least two scientists who have called attention to this schism, namely Lancelot Law Whyte and Trigant Burrow.[1] Whyte calls this disease the “European dissociation,” not because it is peculiar to European-American civilization, but because it is specially characteristic of it.

Both Whyte and Burrow have given a clinical description or diagnosis of the schism, the details of which need not detain us here. It is simply saying in “medical” language that we have allowed brain thinking to develop and dominate our lives out of all proportion to “instinctual wisdom,” which we are allowing to slump into atrophy. As a consequence, we are at war within ourselves—the brain desiring things which the body does not want, and the body desiring things which the brain does not allow; the brain giving directions which the body will not follow, and the body giving impulses which the brain cannot understand.

In one way or another civilized man agrees with St. Francis in thinking of the body as Brother Ass. But even theologians have recognized that the source of evil and stupidity lies not in the physical organism as a whole, but in the cut-off, dissociated brain which they term the “will.”

When we compare human with animal desire we find many extraordinary differences. The animal tends to eat with his stomach, and the man with his brain. When the animal’s stomach is full, he stops eating, but the man is never sure when to stop. When he has eaten as much as his belly can take, he still feels empty, he still feels an urge for further gratification. This is largely due to anxiety, to the knowledge that a constant supply of food is uncertain. Therefore eat as much as you can while you can. It is due, also, to the knowledge that, in an insecure world, pleasure is uncertain. Therefore the immediate pleasure of eating must be exploited to the full, even though it does violence to the digestion.

Human desire tends to be insatiable. We are so anxious for pleasure that we can never get enough of it. We stimulate our sense organs until they become insensitive, so that if pleasure is to continue they must have stronger and stronger stimulants. In self-defense the body gets ill from the strain, but the brain wants to go on and on. The brain is in pursuit of

happiness, and because the brain is much more concerned about the future than the present, it conceives happiness as the guarantee of an indefinitely long future of pleasures. Yet the brain also knows that it does not have an indefinitely long future, so that, to be happy, it must try to crowd all the pleasures of Paradise and eternity into the span of a few years.

This is why modern civilization is in almost every respect a vicious circle. It is insatiably hungry because its way of life condemns it to perpetual frustration. As we have seen, the root of this frustration is that we live for the future, and the future is an abstraction, a rational inference from experience, which exists only for the brain. The "primary consciousness," the basic mind which knows reality rather than ideas about it, does not know the future. It lives completely in the present, and perceives nothing more than what *is* at this moment. The ingenious brain, however, looks at that part of present experience called memory, and by studying it is able to make predictions. These predictions are, relatively, so accurate and reliable (e.g., "everyone will die") that the future assumes a high degree of reality—so high that the present loses its value.

But the future is still not here, and cannot become a part of experienced reality until it is present. Since what we know of the future is made up of purely abstract and logical elements—inferences, guesses, deductions—it cannot be eaten, felt, smelled, seen, heard, or otherwise enjoyed. To pursue it is to pursue a constantly retreating phantom, and the faster you chase it, the faster it runs ahead, This is why all the affairs of civilization are rushed, why hardly anyone enjoys what he has, and is forever seeking more and more. Happiness, then, will consist, not of solid and substantial realities, but of such abstract and superficial things as promises, hopes, and assurances.

Thus the "brainy" economy designed to produce this happiness is a fantastic vicious circle which must either manufacture more and more pleasures or collapse—providing a constant titillation of the ears, eyes, and nerve ends with incessant streams of almost inescapable noise and visual distractions. The perfect "subject" for the aims of this economy is the person who continuously itches his ears with the radio, preferably using the portable kind which can go with him at all hours and in all places. His eyes flit without rest from television screen, to newspaper, to magazine, keeping him in a sort of orgasm-with-out-release through a series of teasing glimpses of shiny automobiles, shiny female bodies, and other sensuous surfaces, interspersed with such restorers of sensitivity—shock treatments

—as “human interest” shots of criminals, mangled bodies, wrecked airplanes, prize fights, and burning buildings. The literature or discourse that goes along with this is similarly manufactured to tease without satisfaction, to replace every partial gratification with a new desire.

For this stream of stimulants is designed to produce cravings for more and more of the same, though louder and faster, and these cravings drive us to do work which is of no interest save for the money it pays—to buy more lavish radios, sleeker automobiles, glossier magazines, and better television sets, all of which will somehow conspire to persuade us that happiness lies just around the corner if we will buy one more.

Despite the immense hubbub and nervous strain, we are convinced that sleep is a waste of valuable time and continue to chase these fantasies far into the night. Animals spend much of their time dozing and idling pleasantly, but, because life is short, human beings must cram into the years the highest possible amount of consciousness, alertness, and chronic insomnia so as to be sure not to miss the last fragment of startling pleasure.

It isn’t that the people who submit to this kind of thing are immoral. It isn’t that the people who provide it are wicked exploiters; most of them are of the same mind as the exploited, if only on a more expensive horse in this sorry-go-round. The real trouble is that they are all totally frustrated, for trying to please the brain is like trying to drink through your ears. Thus they are increasingly incapable of real pleasure, insensitive to the most acute and subtle joys of life which are in fact extremely common and simple.

The vague, nebulous, and insatiable character of brainy desire makes it particularly hard to come down to earth—to be material and real. Generally speaking, the civilized man does not know what he wants. He works for success, fame, a happy marriage, fun, to help other people, or to be a “real person.” But these are not real wants because they are not actual things. They are the by-products, the flavors and atmospheres of real things—shadows which have no existence apart from some substance. Money is the perfect symbol of all such desires, being a mere symbol of real wealth, and to make it one’s goal is the most blatant example of confusing measurements with reality.

It is therefore far from correct to say that modern civilization is materialistic, that is, if a materialist is a person who loves matter. The brainy modern loves not matter but measures, no solids but surfaces. He drinks for the percentage of alcohol (“spirit”) and not for the “body” and

taste of the liquid. He builds to put up an impressive “front” rather than to provide a space for living. Therefore he tends to put up structures which appear from the outside to be baronial mansions but are inwardly warrens. The individual living-units in these warrens are designed less for living as for creating an impression. The main space is devoted to a “living room” of proportions suitable to a large house, while such essential spaces for living (rather than mere “entertaining”) as the kitchen are reduced to small closets where one can hardly move—much less cook. Consequently these wretched little galleys provide fare which is chiefly gaseous—cocktails and “appetizers” rather than honest meals. Because we all want to be “ladies and gentlemen” and look as if we had servants, we do not soil our hands with growing and cooking real food. Instead we buy products designed for “front” and appearance rather than content—immense and tasteless fruit, bread which is little more than a light froth, wine faked with chemicals, and vegetables flavored with the arid concoctions of test tubes which render them so much impressive pulp.

One might suppose that the most outright example of civilized man’s beastliness and animality is his passion for sex, but in fact there is almost nothing beastly or animal about it. Animals have sexual intercourse when they feel like it, which is usually in some sort of rhythmic pattern. Between whiles it does not interest them. But of all pleasures sex is the one which the civilized man pursues with the greatest anxiey. That the craving is brainy rather than bodily is shown by the common impotence of the male when he comes to the act, his brain pursuing what his genes do not at the moment desire. This confuses him hopelessly, because he simply cannot understand *not* wanting the great delicacy of sex when it is available. He has been hankering after it for hours and days on end, but when the reality appears his body will not co-operate.

As in eating his “eyes are bigger than his stomach,” so in love he judges woman by standards that are largely visual and cerebral rather than sexual and visceral. He is attracted to his partner by the surface gloss, by the film on the skin rather than the real body. He wants something with a bone structure like a boy’s which is supposed to support the exterior curves and smooth undulations of femininity—not a woman but an inflated rubber dream. The function of sex itself remains, however, so much in the domain of “instinctual wisdom” that little can be done to increase its already intense pleasure, to make it faster, fancier, and more frequent. The only means of

exploiting it is through cerebral fantasy, through surrounding it with coquetterie and suggestions of unspecified delights to come—as if a more ecstatic embrace could always be arranged through surface alterations.

A particularly significant example of brain against body, or measures against matter, is urban man's total slavery to clocks. A clock is a convenient device for arranging to meet a friend, or for helping people to do things together, although things of this kind happened long before they were invented. Clocks should not be smashed; they should simply be kept in their place. And they are very much out of place when we try to adapt our biological rhythms of eating, sleeping, evacuation, working, and relaxing to their uniform circular rotation. Our slavery to these mechanical drill masters has gone so far and our whole culture is so involved with it that reform is a forlorn hope; without them civilization would collapse entirely. A less brainy culture would learn to synchronize its body rhythms rather than its clocks.

The capacity of the brain to foresee the future has much to do with the fear of death. One knows of many people who would have said with Stevenson,

> *Under the wide and starry sky*
> *Dig me a grave and let me lie;*
> *Glad did I live and gladly die,*
> *And I laid me down with a will.*

For when the body is worn out and the brain is tired, the whole organism welcomes death. But it is difficult to understand how death can be welcome when you are young and strong, so that you come to regard it as a dread and terrible event. For the brain, in its immaterial way, looks into the future and conceives it a good to go on and on and on forever—not realizing that its own material would at last find the process intolerably tiresome. Not taking this into account, the brain fails to see that, being itself material and subject to change, its desires will change, and a time will come when death will be good. On a bright morning, after a good night's rest, you do not want to go to sleep. But after a hard day's work the sensation of dropping into unconsciousness is extraordinarily pleasant.

Unfortunately, not very many of us die peacefully. We die through accidents and painful diseases, and it is tragic indeed when a person whose

“mind” is still young and alert struggles uselessly with a dying body. I am sure, however, that the body dies because it wants to. It finds it beyond its power to resist the disease or to mend the injury, and so, tired out with the struggle, turns to death. If the consciousness were more sensitive to the feelings and impulses of the whole organism, it would share this desire, and, indeed, sometimes does so. We come close to it when, in serious sickness, we would just as soon die, though sometimes we survive, either because medical treatment reinvigorates the body, or because there are still unconscious forces in the organism which are able to heal.

Accustomed, as it is, to think of man as a dualism of mind and body, and to regard the former as “sensible” and the latter as a “dumb” animal, our culture is an affront to the wisdom of nature and a ruinous exploitation of the human organism as a whole. We are perpetually frustrated because the verbal and abstract thinking of the brain gives the false impression of being able to cut loose from all finite limitations. It forgets that an infinity of anything is not a reality but an abstract concept, and persuades us that we desire this fantasy as a real goal of living.

The externalized symbol of this way of thinking is that almost entirely rational and inorganic object, the machine, which gives us the sense of being able to approach infinity. For the machine can submit to strains far beyond the capacity of the body, and to monotonous rhythms which the human being could never stand. Useful as it would be as a tool and a servant, we worship its rationality, its efficiency, and its power to abolish limitations of time and space, and thus permit it to regulate our lives. Thus the working inhabitants of a modern city are people who live inside a machine to be batted around by its wheels. They spend their days in activities which largely boil down to counting and measuring, living in a world of rationalized abstraction which has little relation to or harmony with the great biological rhythms and processes.

As a matter of fact, mental activities of this kind can now be done far more efficiently by machines than by men—so much so that in a not too distant future the human brain may be an obsolete mechanism for logical calculation. Already the human computer is widely displaced by mechanical and electrical computers of far greater speed and efficiency. If, then, man’s principal asset and value is his brain and his ability to calculate, he will become an unsaleable commodity in an era when the mechanical operation of reasoning can be done more effectively by machines.[1]

Already man uses innumerable gadgets to displace the work done by bodily organs in the animals, and it would surely be in line with this tendency to externalize the reasoning functions of the brain—and thus hand over the government of life to electromagnetic monsters. In other words, the interests and goals of rationality are not those of man as a whole organism. If we are to continue to live for the future, and to make the chief work of the mind prediction and calculation, man must eventually become a parasitic appendage to a mass of clockwork.

There is, indeed, a viewpoint from which this "rationalization" of life is not rational. The brain is clever enough to see the vicious circle which it has made for itself. But it can do nothing about it. Seeing that it is unreasonable to worry does not stop worrying; rather, you worry the more at being unreasonable. It is unreasonable to wage a modern war, in which everybody loses. Neither side actually wants a war, and yet, because we live in a vicious circle, we start the war to prevent the other side from starting first. We arm ourselves knowing that if we do not, the other side will—which is quite true, because if we do not arm the other side will do so to gain its advantage without actually fighting.

From this rational point of view we find ourselves in the dilemma of St. Paul—"To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not." But this is not, as St. Paul supposed, because the will or the "spirit" is reasonable and the flesh perverse. It is because "a house divided against itself cannot stand." The whole organism is perverse because the brain is split from the belly and the head unconscious of its union with the tail.

There are few grounds for hoping that, in any immediate future, there will be any recovery of social sanity. It would seem that the vicious circle must become yet more intolerable, more blatantly and desperately circular before any large numbers of human beings awaken to the tragic trick which they are playing on themselves. But for those who see clearly that it is a circle and why it is a circle, there is no alternative but to stop circling. For as soon as you see the whole circle, the illusion that the head is separate from the tail disappears.

And then, when experience stops oscillating and writhing, it can again become sensitive to the wisdom of the body, to the hidden depths of its own substance.

Because I speak of the wisdom of the *body* and of the necessity for recognizing that we are *material*, this is not to be taken as a philosophy of "materialism" in the accepted sense. I am not asserting that the ultimate reality *is* matter. *Matter* is a word, a noise, which refers to the forms and patterns taken by a process. We do not know *what* this process is, because it is not a "what"—that is, a thing definable by some fixed concept or measure. If we want to keep the old language, still using such terms as "spiritual" and "material," the spiritual must mean "the indefinable," that which, because it is living, must ever escape the framework of any fixed form. Matter is spirit named.

After all this, the brain deserves a word for itself! For the brain, including its reasoning and calculating centers, is a part and product of the body. It is as natural as the heart and stomach, and, rightly used, is anything but an enemy of man. But to be used rightly it must be put in its place, for the brain is made for man, not man for his brain. In other words, the function of the brain is to serve the present and the real, not to send man chasing wildly after the phantom of the future.

Furthermore, in our habitual state of mental tension the brain does not work properly, and this is one reason why its abstractions seem to have so great a reality. When the heart is out of order, we are clearly conscious of its beating; it becomes a distraction, pounding within the breast. It seems most probable that our preoccupation with thinking and planning, together with the sense of mental fatigue, is a sign of some disorder of the brain. The brain should, and in some cases does, calculate and reason with the unconscious ease of the other bodily organs. After all, the brain is not a muscle, and is thus not designed for effort and strain.

But when people try to think or concentrate, they behave as if they were trying to push their brains around. They screw up their faces, knit their brows, and approach mental problems as if they were something like heaving bricks. Yet you do not have to grind and strain to digest food, and still less to see, hear, and receive other neural impressions. The "lightning calculator" who can sum a long column of figures at a glance, the intellectual genius who can comprehend a whole page of reading in a few seconds, and the musical prodigy, such as Mozart, who seems to grasp harmony and counterpoint from babyhood, are examples of the proper use of man's most marvelous instrument.

Those of us who are not geniuses know something of the same ability. Take for example the anagram POCATELDIMC. You can work over these letters for hours, trying system after system of rearrangement in order to discover the scrambled word. Try, instead, just looking at the anagram with a relaxed mind, and in a very short space of time your brain will deliver the answer without the slightest effort.[1] We rightly mistrust the "snap" answers of strained and wandering minds, but the rapid, effortless, and almost unconscious solution of logical problems is what the brain is supposed to deliver.

Working rightly, the brain is the highest form of "instinctual wisdom." Thus it should work like the homing instinct of pigeons and the formation of the foetus in the womb—without verbalizing the process or knowing "how" it does it. The self-conscious brain, like the self-conscious heart, is a disorder, and manifests itself in the acute feeling of separation between "I" and my experience. The brain can only assume its proper behavior when consciousness is doing what it is designed for: not writhing and whirling to get out of present experience, but being effortlessly aware of it.

[1] Of L. L. Whyte's books, *The Next Development in Man* (Henry Holt, New York, 1943) is quite readable and deeply interesting, while *The Unitary Principle in Physics and Biology* (Henry Holt, New York, 1949) is strictly for the scientific reader. Burrow's *Social Basis of Consciousness* (London, 1927) and *The Structure of Insanity* (London, 1932) are unhappily out of print, but most of the material is contained in his *Neurosis of Man* (Routledge, London, 1948). There are probably other scientists working on the same lines, but I am not aware of them.

[1] I take my facts on this matter from Norbert Wiener's remarkable book *Cybernetics* (New York & Paris, 1948). Dr. Wiener is one of the mathematicians chiefly responsible for the development of the more elaborate electrical computers. Having likewise an advanced knowledge of neurology, he is well able to judge the extent to which these inventions can reproduce the work of the human organism. His book contains the following pertinent observation: "It is interesting to note that we may be facing one of those limitations of nature, in which highly specialized organs reach a level of declining

efficiency, and ultimately lead to the extinction of the species. The human brain may be as far along on its road to this destructive specialization as the great nose horns of the last of the titanotheres." (p. 180.)

[1] If you don't succeed within one minute, read on! Otherwise you will begin to be annoyed either with yourself, or with me, and the consequent strain will interfere with the process.